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ABSTRACT

This study was performed to help answer questions surrounding the use of interlibrary loan data as a component in selecting periodicals to add to the subscription base of the Penrose Library at the University of Denver (Colorado). Few subscriptions were placed in this library in the 1980s that were not driven by interlibrary loan requests. If articles from a title were requested by three or more individuals, other than undergraduates, the title was considered a prime candidate for subscription. If the title was requested by four borrowers within a two-year period, it was reviewed for subscription, and requests from more than one academic department indicated an interdisciplinary interest in the title. In a nine-year time period, 126 periodicals were subscribed to as a result of this practice. Over 86% of these subscriptions survived a cancellation process. It is speculated that as libraries struggle to develop an effective mix of products to supply user demand, data supplied by interlibrary loan activity will be increasingly valuable in the periodical selection process. (MAS)

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The Right Choice: Using Interlibrary Loan Data for Periodical Selection in an Academic Library

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Abstract

The use of interlibrary loan data to select periodical titles for subscription is advocated. Few subscriptions were placed in the 1980s that were not driven by interlibrary loan requests at the academic library the author describes. Over eight-six percent of these subscriptions survived a cancellation process. The author speculates that as libraries struggle to develop an effective mix of products to supply user needs, data supplied by interlibrary loan activity will be increasingly valuable in the periodical selection process.

The Right Choice: Using Interlibrary Loan Data for Periodical Selection in an Academic Library

This study was done to help answer questions raised in our library surrounding the use of interlibrary loan data as a component in selecting periodicals to add to our subscription base. Are interlibrary loan generated periodical requests a reliable way to develop a user responsive periodical collection?

Is interlibrary loan borrowing data a reasonable collection development tool for our library? Library selectors have presented a number of serial titles for subscription consideration in the last while. Some of these titles have had little or no recorded interlibrary loan borrowing activity in our library over the last four years. That aside, there have been a number of defensible and even compelling reasons put forth for subscribing to many of these titles, interlibrary loan requests or not. We subscribe to relatively few serials and, in fact, ranked in 67th place out of 109 university libraries in number of subscriptions according to the 1992-93 ACRL University Library Statistics.[1] There are a number of graduate programs that rely heavily on serials, including those in the sciences, international studies, and psychology. We have struggled to maintain a serials collection

that can support these programs. There is a lot of interest in serials in our library and one of the major reasons we might subscribe to a title is faculty endorsement. We hope faculty will use each title placed with the same degree of energy they requested we consider it for subscription.

Budgetary limitations, and our policy of not spending more than 60 % of the materials budget on serials, make it necessary to be concerned each and every serial subscription entered will be a valuable addition to our holdings. Valuable has a strong connotation of use. Faculty interest might bring a title forward, but we are also encouraged to assess the degree of future and potential "use" each title added might have. Does a requested title serve a primary clientele, is it interdisciplinary, it is a core title in its discipline, and in how many Penrose held services is it indexed? The more yes answers to the above, the more opportunities for potential use we think will occur, the more likely the chances of our placing a subscription. The more possibilities of maximizing our investment, the more likely we are to subscribe; libraries with our resources can not afford to do otherwise. Clearly we need as many tools as possible to assess the future and potential use a title might get in our library. One of the tools to do that, is to review interlibrary loan activity on a title.

A cursory review of collection development literature reveals that data on interlibrary loan borrowing has been considered by a number of writers as a source of reliable user information for collection development decisions.[2] Actually using interlibrary

loan collected data for collection development decisions was once problematic. It was too impractical. For example, F.K. Rottman reviewed the results of three studies of ways librarians linked interlibrary loan to collection development and recognized the staff input and time to collect data was very burdensome and time-consuming.[3] Automation has helped solve this problem. The authors of *Access Versus Assets* state that it would be "all but impossible to collect, maintain, and interrelate" interlibrary loan data with out the assistance of automation.[4] The results of a periodical request study using an automated interlibrary loan system is reported by Williams and Hubbard.[5] They developed a database structured around requests made on a periodical title and expected the information so collected would be useful in selecting new subscriptions. Hopefully, we can look forward to having a similar system in use, soon, at our library. The Penrose information used for the following was generated from manual files of interlibrary loan transactions kept to satisfy copyright compliance.

From 1980 through 1989 few periodical subscriptions were placed at Penrose Library that were not driven by interlibrary loan demand. Despite this conservative and reactive stance toward new subscriptions, Penrose was spending almost 80 % of its material budget on serials by 1990. Book dependent disciplines were being short changed when in that year the library purchased 8,225 books, but subscribed to almost 5000 serials. A serials review and cancellation project was undertaken in academic year 1990-91 to bring our materials expenditures more in line with university

needs. Faculty participation was sought and encouraged at each step of the review process. By August 1991 a total of 818 serials had been selected for cancellation.

Interlibrary loan requested periodicals, as stated, had been a major source of title generation for periodical subscriptions. Our practice had been that if articles from a title were requested by three or more individuals, other than undergraduates, in two or more departments or academic units within one year, the title was considered a prime candidate for subscription. If the title were requested by any four borrowers within a two year period, the title was reviewed for possible subscription. The library administration considered it an indication of interdisciplinary interest to have individuals from more than one academic department or unit request an article from the same periodical. Having a borrower from both social work and international studies would indicate a possibility of future use from two groups of traditionally heavy library users. However, if students and faculty within one department continued to request articles from a specific periodical over a period of two years, that was considered an indication of more than passing interest. In a nine year time period, 126 periodicals were subscribed to as a result of this practice. If available, a five year back file on microfilm was usually acquired for each subscription. We did not subscribe to every title that meet our criteria. Certain titles, generally medical, were excluded if their scope did not appear to fit into our collecting parameters. When requests exceeded copyright compliance, users were encouraged to go to a holding area library.

Document delivery services did not abound at this time and although we occasionally used them, the user paid for the service. Most of our interlibrary loan requests were readily supplied by a member of our CARL Alliance consortium or from a library in proximity to the state. We were net lenders and we may have had that status some years because we readily encouraged users to go to area libraries for periodicals we did not hold rather than use interlibrary loan. Our collection development practice for periodicals was an internal policy, and one not generally made public or explained to library users. The library's view was that if enough users went through the trouble of requesting an article from a particular periodical through the interlibrary loan process, the periodical had the potential to receive enough use to justify a subscription in a tight library materials budget world. Faculty requesting new periodical subscriptions were usually asked to review a list of periodicals held in their discipline and asked to submit suggestions for cancellation in the amount or close to the amount of a subscription to the requested title. If the request were for a newly published or forthcoming title, the library did explain it preferred to have a track record of requests through interlibrary loan before a subscription was placed. We should remember finding citations to periodical articles once required more effort on a users part than it appears to now. We were assuming a serious interest on the users part, enough to go through the borrowing process. Although our library users had access to a mediated search service since the mid 1970s, direct user access to an online periodical indexing service was not available until

October 1988. At that time, as members of the CARL Alliance, we became one of the first contributors to UnCover. Periodical use in the library and requests for periodical articles from titles we did not hold rose dramatically.[6] How did the periodicals selected as a result of our behind the scene policy fare in the 1990-1991 serials cancellation process? Remember, faculty, students or staff did not have direct input into the selection process for these titles. There would not be a memory of having requested a particular title. Of the 126 titles added as a result of interlibrary loan activity, 20 were canceled, that is 15.8% Three of the canceled titles have been reinstated as a result of user demand thus reducing the cancellation rate to 13.4%. Of the remaining 17 canceled titles, 7 have been requested through interlibrary loan in the last four years with a total of 14 requests. In the four years following our cancellation process, a total of 37 titles or 4% of the original 818 cancellations have been reinstated. Reinstatements were for a number of reasons, including the results of a use study of canceled titles that took place in 1991-1992, faculty and student requests and interlibrary loan demand exceeding copyright compliance. The 3 reinstated interlibrary loan generated titles are 8% of the total reinstatements.

None of this necessarily proves we should place periodical subscriptions only as a result of interlibrary loan activity. It would have been gratifying to have found no more than one or two interlibrary loan driven periodicals canceled. Still 109 titles or 86.5% of the original 126 titles remain in our subscription base.

Analysis of these particular canceled and not reinstated periodicals might uncover some factors which would help identify why they were canceled. In the cancellation process faculty were asked to rank each title as essential, important, desirable, or unnecessary. Each academic unit had a target dollar figure for cancellation. Perhaps cost (the subscriptions ranged from $11 to $1,490) influenced faculty in their deselection decisions as much as the focus of the periodical or its perceived value to their work. The canceled titles were all in fields we have traditionally considered strengths. It would be difficult to query the faculty involved at this date so we can only speculate. I argue on the side of giving interlibrary loan requested periodicals emphasis in the collection development process for the same reason I did in the past: such requests represent a record of actual use by a user and not intended use. We can not afford to add new subscriptions solely on speculation of potential use. The periodical must have a previous track record of use. Our library is not a growth library. I see all paper based subscriptions going through a much more rigorous, winnowing process before they are placed then they do now. As we struggle to develop an efficient mix of access to information products for our users, document delivery and full text will be serious contenders. A paper based subscription placed at Penrose in the foreseeable future will have an almost irrefutable chance of being used. Interlibrary loan data will help us make the right choice.

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